

46

Report of the Legislative Committee

of the

Penna. State Educational Association



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REPORT OF THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

(This report gives a concise summary of the most important educational legislation recently enacted, and a clear presentation of the needs of the schools for greater financial support. The report makes also a valuable contribution to the discussion of the pressing question of teachers' salaries. "Current Education", therefore, is glad to give publicity to the report at this time and heartily commends it to the attention of all interested in the public schools of the State.—Editor.)

Philadelphia, Pa.,
December 29, 1919.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE
ASSOCIATION:

The report of the legislative committee to the 1918 meeting of the association outlined a program of legislation the carrying out of which was regarded as essential to the best interest alike of the teachers and of the schools. The most important features of this program were discussed in some detail under the heads of

1. The appropriation for the Retirement System.
2. Teachers' salaries.
3. The minimum school term.
4. Consolidation of rural schools.
5. Compulsory school attendance, physical education, medical inspection and special education for handicapped children.
6. Revenues to meet these needs.

Immediately upon the convening of the legislature your committee took active steps toward the realization of this program, giving such assistance as it could for the promotion of each important measure designed to meet the demands of any item, but concentrating its attention especially upon the Woodruff bill, introduced early in the session of the legislature, which attempted to solve the problem of teacher shortage by making provision for increasing salaries.

After numerous amendments to this bill involving omissions, additions, and changes that comprised practically a complete redrafting of the text, it was enacted into law July 10, 1919.

The interest in this and other educational legislation was so strong that, at the request of President Downes, the chairman of the legislative committee prepared a memorandum upon the subject for the information of the members of the association. This memorandum constituted, in effect, a preliminary report of the committee and it was printed and given wide publicity. In order to summarize and place officially upon the records the results of the work of the committee, excerpts from this communication are herein given.

"The teachers and the friends of public education were fortunate indeed in finding in Governor Sproul a man not only highly appreciative of the public school system and earnestly desirous of promoting its best interests, but also intensely practical in his aims and methods, willing personally to devote a generous portion of the time so precious to a chief executive of a great state to the problems presented by the schools and able to give valuable counsel and assistance to those who were concerned in the detailed work of effecting a betterment of educational conditions.

"This fine attitude of the Governor and the co-operation he cheerfully gave in such gen-

the time for the relief of a great emergency. It has the outstanding merit of securing more than \$6,000,000 (\$3,000,000 a year) from the state and a like amount from the local districts for the increase of teachers' salaries. It also repealed Section 1213 of the code under which there had been a distribution of a portion of the general state appropriation to school districts which was clearly unequitable.

The teachers of the state are not unmindful of these good features of the bill, nor ungrateful to those who enacted the measure; but the fact remains that this legislature has failed to accomplish its purpose. It has somewhat ameliorated conditions, but the shortage of teachers still exists and the supply in sight for future demands is grossly inadequate. This is indicated by the decrease (upwards of 25 per cent.) in normal school enrollment at a time when a larger increase is imperatively needed. There is every reason to believe, therefore, that conditions are likely to become worse before they become better.

That this should be so is plainly evident, the mathematics of the situation are so elementary. The Woodruff bill provided an increase over pre-war salaries of approximately twenty per cent., the cost of living for the same period has increased approximately one hundred per cent. Meanwhile salaries in the business and industrial world have risen to meet the cost of living. The teacher shortage is created, therefore, by those who leave the service to endeavor to earn a better living and by those who refuse to prepare for what seems to be a hopelessly unprofitable career.

Moreover, the endeavor to meet the shortage has resulted in a lowering of standards lamentably harmful to the schools. Statistics carefully collated for the country as a whole indicate an existing shortage of 38,000 (vacan-

cies that cannot be filled) to which must be added 65,000 positions filled only by the lowering of standards, making a total need for 100,000 qualified teachers which cannot now be met.

Pennsylvania contributes its due quota to this deplorably large total. In view of these conditions, it is not too much to say that the salaries of teachers must be made commensurate with those of other wage earners and that the Woodruff bill must be amended or replaced by other legislation that will accomplish this purpose.

3. *The Minimum School Term.* The law requiring a school term of at least seven months was enacted twenty-one years ago. More than half of the school districts of the state do not exceed this minimum. So long as this condition is permitted to exist, it is a mockery which challenges contempt to claim that there is equality of educational opportunity in this commonwealth. The truth is that the pupils of the majority of our rural districts with their one-room schools and short school terms are deprived of their birthright — the opportunity to secure a modern education.

In spite of the cost that it would impose upon the school district and the state, the raising of the minimum school term to eight months at least should no longer be delayed.

4. *More Money for the Schools.* The statements of fact that we have made concerning the three items thus briefly considered we believe are incontrovertible and will receive practically universal assent. The maintenance of the integrity of the retirement system, the solution of the teacher shortage problem, the lengthening of the school term are matters of vital importance for the welfare of the schools, and involve in the aggregate enormous additional expenditures.

assigned to a sub-committee of your Legislative Committee consisting of the Secretary, Miss Elizabeth Baker, of Harrisburg, and one other member, Mr. A. C. Gordon, of Pittsburgh. Mr. Gordon's unfortunate illness resulted in his place being taken by Mr. C. R. Foster, also of Pittsburgh. This sub-committee labored in season and out, in conference with individual members and committees of the Legislature, in public hearings concerning these measures, and in conference with the Governor himself. The results of their labors speak for themselves, but it is only those who know the hours and days of service and the untiring zeal with which they worked unselfishly for the good of the cause who are able adequately to appreciate the value of their efforts.

"We have grown so used to the active and effective co-operation of the State Teachers' League through its able President, Miss Lucy Glass, that we are apt to take this as a matter of course, but it should not, on that account, fail to receive special mention. Of the entire group of those interested in promoting this legislation, no one labored more unceasingly, more earnestly, more tactfully, or more effectively, than Miss Glass and to her and to the others herein named, the teachers of the State and the friends of public education owe a debt of gratitude not easy to discharge."

The facts thus reported constitute a record of accomplishment with which the association might well rest satisfied were it not that a careful review of the results to date discloses that the legislation enacted falls far short of meeting the requirements of the extraordinary situation with which the school system of the state is confronted.

The following considerations, we believe, will make this clear and, we hope, will stimulate the association to renewed and effective efforts.

1. *The Retirement System.* The actuarial evaluation of the needs of the system required by the law to determine the rates of contributions that must be made by the employee,

the employer, and the state was based upon incomplete data because the enrollment of members of the retirement association was in progress. The appropriation made in this legislature, though adequate for immediate purposes, will fail to meet the ultimate needs occasioned by the unprecedentedly large enrollment with which the system opened its books on July 1, 1919.

The evaluation, to be made in 1921, will be based upon a complete system of records and should, therefore, be an accurate and unequivocal statement of the financial requirements of the system which must be met. By that time, the total payroll of school employees will have been increased by \$10,000,000 or more due to growth of the system and to the effects of the Woodruff bill. This will necessitate a much larger total contribution on the part of the state. Without attempting accurately to anticipate the results of the actuarial computations upon which the state appropriation must be based, it is safe to say that to provide for the 1921 evaluation and for any deficiency in the initial appropriation of the 1919 legislature, at least \$3,000,000 will be required.

Pennsylvania enjoys the unusual distinction of having a retirement system for the employees of the public schools based upon sound principles and correct in every detail of the technical procedure by which the amounts of the necessary appropriations are determined, and the obligations assumed by the state as expressed in the retirement law must be met however large they seem. It is the magnitude of the system with upwards of 50,000 employees that necessitates and justifies the large appropriations.

2. *Teachers' Salaries.* The enactment of the Woodruff bill was the best that could be accomplished at

erous measure was reflected in the Legislature. The members of the Senate and the House alike gave unstintingly of their time and attention to measures looking toward the improvement of the schools, and your Legislative Committee experienced a genuine pleasure in working with the authorities at Harrisburg for the achievement of this purpose.

"In consequence of these favorable conditions—representing an after-the-war interest in public education as a prime factor in the work of reconstruction of the period of peace now happily inaugurated—it is perhaps not too much to say that the legislation affecting the public schools presented for consideration at this session of the Legislature has never been exceeded in importance in the history of the Commonwealth, with perhaps the single exception of the year in which the school code was enacted.

"The most important educational measure before the Legislature was that providing for the increase of teachers' salaries and the division of the cost of this increase between the state and the local districts. It was universally recognized that owing to unprecedented economic conditions the schools were threatened with a teacher famine and that something must be done, not only in justice to a group of public laborers worthy of their hire, whose salaries had failed to keep pace with the rapidly mounting cost of living, but also to save the school system itself from dire disaster.

"The bill which was framed in response to the widespread demand of school authorities and the public alike endeavored to meet this emergency by establishing a graded increase in salaries, giving most largely to the lowest salaried groups and to the districts in greatest need of help.

"The legislators were practically unanimous in their approval of the bill and the Governor's approval was given to the proposition that the state should assist to the limit of the funds at its disposal. The school system is so large that even small percentage increases run into millions and it was necessary to keep these within the available resources. As finally passed, the bill provided for \$6,000,000 of state revenue to be

devoted to increase of teachers' salaries, in addition to about \$4,500,000 heretofore given to certain districts under Section 1213 of the Code, this section being repealed and the amount of the school appropriation thus released being applied to meet the requirement of the salary bill.

"Other important educational legislation effected includes:

"1. An appropriation of \$750,000 for carrying the Retirement System for Public School Employees into effect.

"2. Measures to facilitate the consolidation of rural schools and providing state aid for this purpose.

"3. Measures providing for the special education of children handicapped by physical or mental defects and providing state aid for the same.

"4. Measures to improve medical inspection service and to extend its operation.

"In the furthering of all this legislation the Legislative Committee took active part, its work justifying the claim that even in their support of the salary bill 'the teachers were making no mere selfish plea for personal advantage but were seeing beyond their own necessities to those of the schools and were keenly interested in the maintenance of good schools and the betterment of educational conditions.'

"All of the educational measures enacted will greatly enhance the efficiency of the school system. The salary increase provided, while still far from meeting the real necessities of the case, is a very important first step in a great emergency and represents the generous effort of a state with enormous demands upon its treasury which it is unable to meet until it shall have found new sources of revenue.

"This brief review of the educational legislation can not properly be concluded without special reference to the work performed by certain representatives of the teachers who were almost constantly on the job in the halls of legislation in Harrisburg, promoting the interests of those who had lodged this responsibility in them, and the interests of the schools of the state.

"The detailed work of this kind was

The foregoing enumeration of the needs of the schools and the plea for the funds to meet them, merely hit some of the high spots. The legislation recently enacted in the interests of compulsory school attendance, for the extension and improvement of school medical inspection, and for special education for handicapped children also makes large demands upon the treasuries of both the local districts and the state. And the paradox should be noted that increase in the efficiency of the school system, in itself, adds to the expense. Better schools attract more pupils and induce them to remain to complete the higher and more expensive courses. Unlike efficiency in the business world, the returns do not show upon the books in immediate increase in profits; but are reaped later in the development of a citizenry physically stronger, intellectually keener, morally better, vocationally more capable, and civically more serviceable.

It is everywhere asserted that education furnishes the best possible insurance against the spirit of revolution engendered by the war and provides the means for an orderly evolution that will stabilize a civilization at present seething with discontent and unintelligent class antagonisms. In order that education may play its allotted part in making our own country safe for democracy not meager but abundant financial support of the schools becomes the most urgent demand of the times.

In this age of laudation of the

importance and value of the public school as the "palladium of our liberties" and "the bulwark of civilization" it would seem incredible, were it not a commonplace of school reports, that children in our great cities should be on a short schoolday basis for lack of school houses and that in rural districts they should be on a short school-year basis for lack of funds for current expenses. Is it not time to expend less oratory upon the "palladium" and the "bulwark" and to devote more money to its support?

If those who are unable to digest the statistical enumeration of the enormous wealth of Pennsylvania, will stimulate their imaginations by reflecting for a moment upon the almost untold wealth of its forests, its mines, its oil wells, its rich farms, its commerce and its industries, they will appreciate the absurdity of the plea that there is not enough money available to relieve the truly tragic situation which the school system is facing. More money for the schools can and must be raised.

Respectfully submitted,

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